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ABSTRACT

The increase in size and number of multinational corporations requires programs for training their personnel in intercultural communication emphasizing development of skills necessary for cultural adaptation and a "universal" perspective. Currently, intercultural training is either nonexistent or emphasizes mastery of language with little attention to skill development. The universal perspective underscores the importance of nonverbal behavioral components of cultural sensitivity. A successful program used to train supervisors in cultural sensitivity consists of three levels: cultural awareness, practicing cultural awareness skills, and applying skills to specific cultural situations. The first level is a discussion of exactly what culture means, and the general components of specific cultures. The second level deals with a demonstration of appropriate culturally sensitive skills and emphasizes development of empathy. Other skills that must be demonstrated are showing personal respect, being nonjudgmental and flexible, being spontaneous, and using problem orientation. Cultural humility is also emphasized. In the third level, skills are applied in cultural situations by means of role-playing exercises, and appropriate behavior learning is reinforced. (HTH)

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COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVENESS IN MULTINATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:

Developing Universal Intercultural Skills

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- Jane has just received her M.B.A. and is hired as a management trainee for a multinational corporation.
- Derek, a German computer technologist, is being transferred to a division of his company located in the southern part of the United States.
- Bill is a production supervisor for a large American multinational electronics firm. His work group is composed of mainly Filipino women with little language proficiency.
- Ruth is a senior vice-president for a company in Michigan that has just been purchased by one of the world's largest multinational corporations.

Each of the individuals in the above situations is faced with a similar problem. How can they effectively integrate themselves into an unfamiliar organizational culture? Because of a shift toward worldwide markets and competition, companies are faced with the challenge of preparing their personnel to do business in cultures other than their own.

During the past three decades multinational corporations have increased in size and number in various parts of the world. "Sales abroad by U.S. firms from exports and direct investment in 1978 were $435 billion plus, compared to about $33 billion from both sources just 25 years earlier" (Cateora and Hess, 1979, p. 4). Numerous major corporations, including I.B.M., Pfizer, Gillette, Hoover, Coca-Cola, Ferro, International Systems and Controls, Sirco, J. W. Thompson and F. W. Woolworth, receive over half their earnings from foreign operations (Loudon and Della Bitta, 1979; Cateora and Hess, 1979). The current expansion of foreign companies in the United States also parallels the rapid growth of U.S. companies abroad. Harris (1979b) reports that at least two million Americans now work within the borders of the United States for foreign employers.

The Need for Universal Cross Cultural Skills

Vital to the success of conducting business cross-culturally is the importance of training business personnel how to be culturally sensitive

rather than ethnocentric-- the tendency to judge another culture according to one's own cultural perspective.

The purpose of this paper is to suggest that training programs designed to train multinational personnel in intercultural communication need to consider a universal perspective. Such training needs to emphasize skill development which gives personnel an understanding of the behaviors necessary to make the appropriate cultural adaptations. The paper begins by exploring the need for universal cross cultural skill development for business personnel. The authors then discuss the role of cultural sensitivity and empathy in developing a universal skill perspective. Finally, specific applications are made to training programs specifically designed to develop cultural sensitivity.

Most training programs designed to prepare business persons to function effectively in a new culture are highly inadequate. According to one survey, 35 percent of the companies which send personnel abroad provide training on an occasional basis and 35 percent provide no training at all (Bennett and Desatnick, 1978). Waxman (1977) surveyed 180 United States companies conducting business in Latin America. Of the 99 companies responding, 69% provided no cross cultural training. When they were asked why, 37% answered that they had not previously considered the importance of cross cultural training, 32% reported that they did not have enough time for cross cultural training, 15% said that cross cultural training was too expensive, and 10% said that they did not know where to get the resources. With a second sample, Waxman found that 77% of the companies provided general cross cultural training, 39% provided culture-specific training before employee departure, and 24% offered culture-specific training within the host culture.

Schaaf (1981) points out that the average cost of sending a corporate representative to a foreign assignment ranges from $75,000 to nearly $150,000 and that at least 30% of those sent have to be recalled early because they are not adequate for the task. Other training groups report that as high as 65% of those sent overseas return before their tour is over. Some problems arise because representatives are not well-prepared, others because their spouses and dependents are not able to withstand the "culture shock."

There is clearly a need for cross cultural sensitivity training programs. The training is often nonexistent or emphasizes the mastery of language with little or no attention given to skill development. Most companies hope that through frequent exposure and gradual language proficiency, business persons will begin to function effectively in the new culture.

Our experience suggests that business persons adjusting to new cultural norms do not have the behavioral skills necessary for successful acculturation. In developing a universal perspective for training in cross cultural sensitivity, the understanding and practice of specific behaviors is critical. An American business person who is offered a cup of coffee by a Saudi-Arabian host may know that the culturally sensitive thing to do is to accept the offer. However, can the business person demonstrate the appropriate behaviors (eye contact, facial expressions, tone of voice) to convey a genuine acceptance of the offer? The production supervisor who is supervising mainly Filipinos may understand the value that the Filipino culture places on maintaining smooth interpersonal relationship. However, being able to actually promote more harmony in relationships may be a more difficult task for the supervisor.

The universal perspective underscores the importance of the behavioral components of cultural sensitivity. Such a perspective has its roots in the notion that there are nonverbal behaviors which may be universal in their

expression. In the last decade, much research in the nonverbal area has attempted to document the universality and innateness of emotional expressions (Charlesworth and Kreutzer, 1973; Ekman, 1972; Ekman and Friesen, 1971). Much of this research has supported the universality of facial expressions and certain emotions. Photos of faces expressing happiness, fear, surprise, sadness, anger, disgust, and interest have been easily identified by observers in at least six different countries. Thus, there does seem to be some universal connection between certain facial muscular patterns and discrete emotions. This does not mean that all aspects of facial affect displays are universal. While the facial muscles and thus expressions are the same across cultures, the context, display rules and consequences for expression can vary a great deal.

The universalist position documented by research in the area of nonverbal communication has much to say to those interested in developing more culturally sensitive business persons. First of all, such research gives emphasis to the importance of nonverbal cues in conveying meaning. Our experience suggests that nonverbal cues have high validity for persons experiencing "culture shock." Also, the universalist position underscores the importance of being able to demonstrate certain universal feelings and emotions in the appropriate contexts.

Developing Cultural Sensitivity

How is cultural sensitivity developed? Recently, the authors completed a pilot program on developing cultural sensitivity (Stull and Baird, 1981a). The program was developed for a multinational electronics company and directed at helping manufacturing supervisors deal with cultural differences. The model used to train the supervisors in cultural sensitivity has the following three dimensions:

Level I - Cultural Awareness (General and Specific)

Level II - Practicing Cultural Awareness Skills

Level III - Applying Skills to Specific Cultural Situations

Level I - Cultural Awareness (General and Specific)

We usually begin our training with a discussion of exactly what culture means. We find Terpstra's (1978) model of the composition of the cultural environment of international business provides a convenient perspective for dealing with the general components of culture. He defines eight broad categories: language, religion, attitudes and values, education, social organization, technology and material culture, politics and law. He demonstrates clearly that an organization's viability depends upon how it relates to these environmental conditions and how its representatives transcend blinders imposed by their home cultures. Stull and Baird (1980) have developed these components more completely in a previous paper.

Once the participants have a good understanding of culture and its components, we then begin to talk about the specific information relevant to understanding a particular culture. We have developed a series of culture-specific fact sheets that we have found very helpful to participants in understanding cultures. Below is a sample of one sheet developed to describe people from the Philippines:

THE PHILIPPINES[1]

Emphasis on education.	You may find people in assembly-line work with college and graduate degrees.
Extreme sense of pride.	You may notice a strong orientation toward Filipino culture, other people from The Philippines, etc. You may also notice a strong sense of nationalism; patriotism.
Understand upward mobility.	While they have roots of group goals, Westernization has taught them that hard work will result in success.
Value interpersonal relationships.	You may notice an extreme sense of hospitality or graciousness among Filipinos. They will often avoid criticism, conflict, direct confrontation or injury to one's self-esteem. They will ask many personal questions to show they care. They may avoid being candid to avoid hurting anyone. They may give socially acceptable answers and may give-in to avoid arguments.
Preference for Filipino leadership.	Filipinos like to be led by Filipinos. They prefer to be led and supervised by their own, regardless of qualifications.
Emphasis on patience and compliance.	Filipinos are fatalistic and believe that they have little control over their own lives.
Emphasis on repaying obligations.	Obligations are taken seriously; you may find that if you do a favor for a Filipino, you will receive a favor.

REMEMBER: When you are communicating with Filipino workers, you may give a handshake or a pat on the back. You should show definite concern for individuals. Avoid judgments. Sit and talk with them for a while. Avoid criticizing Filipinos' work, family honor, appearance. Do not tell them things that they already know or remind them of things that they already planned to do. Avoid shame, teasing, or sarcasm.

Source: People of Philippines, Language and Intercultural Research Center, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, 1977.

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[1]Stull, James B. and John W. Baird, Developing Cultural Awareness, a training program developed for Hewlett-Packard, March, 1981a.

Level I consists of mini-lectures and structured exercises designed to create an understanding and awareness of culture-general and culture-specific information. Level I relies primarily on an intellectual or cognitive perspective.

Level II - Practicing Cultural Awareness Skills

While Level I deals primarily with cognitive information, Level II gets into the behavioral. It is our position that it isn't enough to just be aware. To be totally culturally sensitive, one must be able to demonstrate the appropriate skills. At this point we introduce the following cultural awareness skills (Stull and Baird, 1981a):

1. SHOWING PERSONAL RESPECT: the ability to demonstrate unconditional positive respect for others without acting ethnocentric or superior.

2. BEING NONJUDGMENTAL: the ability to see things as they "are" rather than as they "should be."

3. BEING FLEXIBLE: the ability to tolerate ambiguity and to deal with the unexpected in a culturally appropriate/sensitive manner.

4. BEING SPONTANEOUS: the ability to drop expectations and to deal with individual situations perceptively on a "here and now" basis.

5. USING PROBLEM-ORIENTATION: the ability to encourage and obtain the input and participation of others to approach and solve problems in a culturally appropriate manner.

6. BEING EMPATHIC: the ability to "try" to see the world through the eyes of others, realizing that one's own view is personal; the ability to employ cultural relativism.

Each of these skills is discussed, demonstrated and participants are given exercises in order to practice specific skills. At Level II, particular attention is given to the understanding and development of empathy. Of all the skills, it is our feeling that the demonstration of empathy is at the core of developing a universal perspective for cultural sensitivity skill.

In everyday terms, empathy is often defined as the ability to look at things from another person's point of view. When we act empathic, we

participate with another person by attempting to put ourselves in the other person's experience (Rogers, 1961, 1962). Empathy can be contrasted with ethnocentric behavior which is the tendency to judge and evaluate from your own point of view. With ethnocentric behavior there is a tendency to say, "My country is better than yours," or "Me first." With empathic behavior one asks, "How do you see things," or "Let me try to understand your experience."

As we discuss empathy with participants we emphasize the importance of not only trying to understand another person's values, but more importantly to accept them. Schein (1981) says that culturally sensitive managers must develop a cultural humility:

> Beyond self-insight and the ability to understand others, we need something which we might call cultural/moral humility. Can we not only sense the values of other people but more importantly, positively appreciate them? Can we see our own culture and values as different, not necessarily as better (Schein, 1981, p. 46).

Once participants have an understanding of the concept empathy, we begin to illustrate and practice the verbal and nonverbal behaviors that characterize empathic communication. Particular attention is given to eye contact, facial expressions, head nods and tone of voice as strong universal indicators of empathic communication. Participants are also encouraged to practice empathic communication through exercises on active listening. A sample exercise is presented below (Stull and Baird, 1981a):

EXERCISE
Practicing Active Listening

One of the most important skills in developing cultural sensitivity is the ability to listen. In order to check on your ability to use active listening, you and your partner should go through the following steps one at a time.

Decide which of you will start first. The first speaker will complete the following item in two or three sentences:

My understanding of cultural differences is . . .

The second speaker then repeats in his or her own words what the first speaker has said. The first speaker must be satisfied that he/she has been heard accurately.

The second speaker then completes the same item and the first speaker paraphrases what has been said to the satisfaction of the second speaker.

Continue to follow the procedure for each of the items.

* As a supervisor my biggest strength in relating to employees from different cultural backgrounds is . . .
* At HP, I feel that some employees from different cultural backgrounds feel . . .
* The thing that I most need to improve in working with employees from different cultural backgrounds is . . .
* When I am experiencing a language problem with an employee, I usually . . .
* The culture that I find it easiest to relate to among my employees is . . .
* The culture I find it most difficult to relate to among my employees is . . .
* In general, employees from different cultural backgrounds see me as . . .

Level II begins to force particpants to look at themselves more objectively. Self-insight and awareness are encouraged through exercises and role-play situations. These situations are processed thoroughly and participants are encouraged to relate experiences to their own behaviors.

Level III - Applying Skills to Specific Cultural Situations

Level III takes the behavioral skill development one step further and helps participants apply cultural sensitivity skills to the culture-specific information already presented. Level III is the major goal for achieving true cultural sensitivity. At this level, cultural sensitivity is achieved when individuals can display the appropriate behaviors in relationship to their knowledge of what is culturally sensitive in a particular cultural

context. A classic example of such sensitivity is the news picture of Henry Kissinger, then U.S. Secretary of State, holding hands side-by-side with Egypt's President Sadat. Kissinger was obviously behaving in a way appropriate to Sadat's experience of male hand-holding.

During Level III, participants are given specific behaviors on how to demonstrate the cultural sensitivity skills for a particular culture. For example, since the Filipino culture places great value on smooth interpersonal relationships, in order to show empathy you may want to ask more personal questions and show nonverbal cues which indicate warmth, acceptance and hospitality (face-to-face communication, close spacial distance, smiling and head nods). In order to show personal respect for a Chinese employee, it is best to stand further away, avoid direct eye contact or touching behavior. A soft and not loud or boisterous tone is best.

Role-playing is crucial to the success of Level III. By giving employees actual situations and having them "act out" appropriate behaviors, learning is reinforced. The following situation is an example of a role-play used in our cultural sensitivity program (Stull and Baird, 1981a):

ROLE PLAY EXERCISE

Supervisor:

You are having some problems with Noblesa, one of your Filipino employees. Lately, you've noticed a real change in her work behavior. She started with you about 4 months ago and her work behavior was excellent. Lately, she has been missing a lot of work and when she is at work, she doesn't seem to be as concerned about the quality of her work. You've noticed that her work area has been particularly "messy." You haven't had many conversations with her, but feel that you must talk to her at this time. How would you handle this situation?

Applications to Training and Development

This paper has advanced the notion that there is a need for the development of intercultural communication programs which take a universal perspective. Such a perspective underscores the importance of nonverbal behaviors in conveying complete cultural sensitivity.

The training approach discussed in this paper involves three levels essential to developing cultural sensitivity. It is not enough to just be aware of cultural differences. Complete cultural sensitivity involves the ability to actually apply skills to particular cultures. The importance of empathy in developing cultural sensitivity is emphasized.

Organizations must begin to design training programs which really prepare their personnel to effectively meet these cultural challenges. As more and more companies are becoming multi-cultural, training in cultural sensitivity should be part of a manager's general management training. Training in cultural sensitivity when coupled with language training along with actual experience living in the culture, can be a very effective combination.

We are beginning to suggest alternative delivery systems for handling training in cross cultural sensitivity. In a recent paper, the authors outlined a "train-the-trainer" approach for dealing with cultural sensitivity (Stull and Baird, 1981b). Such an approach is attractive to industry because it is most cost effective and allows the organization to use in-house personnel on an on-going basis to conduct training. Materials can be tailored to particular needs of an organization.

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